

■ **My employee is in treatment following a positive drug test. Should I ask the employee how the treatment is going? It is no secret. Everybody knows about the situation. Will my obvious interest help keep the employee motivated?**

Your employee's participation in and cooperation with a treatment program following a positive drug test may be verified to your agency or the EAP depending on your agency's drug free workplace policy. If "asking how things are going" means eliciting in-depth information about treatment, you should avoid doing so. You may have a strong desire to know more, but it is advisable not to inquire about or discuss treatment. Gaining self-awareness, feeling well, and achieving new insights make recovery exciting. Your employee may share this excitement with you, but don't push for it. Excitement does not equate to cooperation in treatment or ongoing recovery. To help your employee remain motivated, rely only upon feedback that is authorized, and most importantly, stay focused on acceptable job performance behavior.

■ **How can the EAP help supervisors avoid getting involved in the emotional aspects of personal problems their employees often face?**

When employees share personal problems, it can be tempting for supervisors to involve themselves in the discovery of solutions. Many supervisors become entangled in the personal problems of employees, and if situations are difficult and chronic, this can become a burdensome task that eventually takes an emotional toll. Concerned supervisors with strong emotional ties to employees may empathize too deeply, adding to their own stress. This can increase enabling behaviors even as performance deteriorates. Talk to the EAP about making a referral and how EAP contact might help an employee. Supervisors are then free to detach and manage performance while allowing EA professionals to do the helping.

■ **My employee takes frequent and unexpected time off during the year to take care of four young children. It's tough, and I feel sorry for**

To you, this problem appears straightforward. It is usually the case, however, that new information not known to a supervisor is learned during an EAP assessment, and this is when solutions are often discovered. Although there is no way to measure it, let's simply say that supervisors may never get more than 80 percent of the true story or scope of the issues involved. The rest is learned in a confidential meeting with the

her. How can the EAP help? This employee obviously needs support at home. I don't think there is anything else going on.

the EAP. This employee may not be telling you the entire story about the problem she faces, trying to ensure that you continue to see her in the best possible light and withholding information or aspects of the problem that do not serve this purpose. This illustrates why it is risky to assume the EAP can't help an employee. The bottom line is that many underlying issues often exist. The EAP conducts a thorough assessment and offers appropriate referrals and follow-up to help an employee resolve personal problems that impact job performance.

■ **Many supervisors don't have formal training in conflict resolution. Is it a skill that is too complex for them to perform successfully? Is there a formula for conflict resolution?**

Even if supervisors don't have formal training in conflict resolution, they can facilitate acceptable outcomes to conflicts. It can be helpful to get specific training or coaching from organizational experts or to read about conflict resolution. Regardless, every supervisor can learn the basics. Employees in conflict must be tasked with the responsibility of resolving differences. Supervisors should not own the conflict. Don't accept status quo if conflict resolution does not initially appear successful. Continue to address inappropriate behavior. It is not acceptable for two employees to remain in conflict or for the work unit to suffer the consequences. Approaches to conflict resolution include: 1) Acknowledging that a conflict exists. 2) Allowing employees to air feelings in an open and nonjudgmental setting. 3) Getting agreement on the nature of the conflict. 4) Discussing needs instead of arguing about solutions; 5) Working to find common ground. 6) Formulating solutions, following up, and having an intervention strategy in case unacceptable behavior occurs in the future. Consultation with your agency HR is advisable. Discussing the situation with your EA professional may provide additional strategies and beneficial solutions.

■ **Some managers have inadequate communication skills. They may not communicate enough, may not give good feedback or facilitate discussions very well, and may be too aggressive, vague, or overly critical. How can supervisors identify and resolve these types of communication issues?**

Supervisors need feedback before they can identify gaps in supervisory and interpersonal skills. A survey is one way to go, but asking employees directly as you interact with them is ideal. It takes a strong supervisor to be this open, but the enhancement of morale that comes with being accessible is worth it. Discover your supervisory strengths and limitations one conversation at a time. Start by asking employees if they are getting the right amount of supervision from you and if it matches their expectations. Once that need is met, discuss periodically whether you: 1) clearly communicate; 2) clarify issues and provide helpful feedback; 3) ask for opinions and input; 4) show respect while holding employees accountable; 5) demonstrate fairness; 6) create opportunities for successful growth; 6) make yourself available to discuss issues and problems; and 7) recognize, praise, and inspire employees. This proactive approach will help you make ongoing adjustments and will generally prevent problems from escalating.

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